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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000045

DEPT FOR DS/TIA/OSAC, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/IP/EUR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC KRIM KSAC CASC

SUBJECT: OSAC ANNUAL CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT -- YEREVAN

REF: 08 STATE 132056

I1. (U) In accordance with Reftel A, the following information is provided.

2 (U) BEGIN TEXT

OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

II. Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

The crime and safety situation in Armenia is better than average in comparison to a large size city in the U.S. Violent crime against expatriates is rare; however, expatriates are attractive targets to criminals, as they tend to have and/or display more wealth.

During the first 9 months of 2008 (final statistics are not available yet), an increase in crime had been reported in Armenia of 4.8% from 2007. Violent crime in Armenia for the first 9 months of 2008 shows an increase of 1.11%. Crime occurrence is highest in the capital of Yerevan (31.4%) with the lowest occurrence in Gegharkunik province (11.1%), Syunik province (12.7%) and Armavir province (13.1%).

IA. Crime Threats: Most crimes reported to the Embassy by American citizens are relatively minor, such as pick-pocketing, vehicular break-ins, purse snatching, and cell phone theft. In the last year there have been no reports of burglaries of homes in EMBOFF neighborhoods nor has post's Consular Affairs section passed on any reports of crimes involving American citizens to RSO.

Criminals, if armed, often carry edged weapons instead of firearms, and may use force if resisted. Unlike other countries in the region, Armenia has not experienced problems with car-jackings.

IB. Safety: All roads in the Republic of Armenia are in an extremely poor state of repair. Traffic signals are often out of commission and potholes large enough to cause serious damage to automobiles are common. Drivers show little or no courtesy for other drivers and do not obey any recognizable traffic laws. Traffic accidents resulting in death for the first 9 months of 2008 increased 15.5% from 2007.

Travel in Armenia requires caution. Public transportation can be unreliable and unsafe, especially mini-buses called "marshrutki." Travel at night is not recommended due to the lack of street lights, and winter travel can be extremely hazardous particularly in mountain areas and higher elevation.

An uptick in the incidences of belligerent drivers and aggressive road rage directed against Americans in Yerevan has been noticed. Most frequently this involves drivers of expensive cars who feel that they are privileged or entitled and above the law. Incidents of physical aggression and harassment against drivers, passengers and pedestrians have occurred.

IC. Other: Armenia is also home to numerous stray animals, particularly dogs. In the past year there have been numerous reports by Embassy personnel of aggressive street

animals. Visitors to Armenia should exercise caution when near any animal, and no attempts should be made to pet or feed them. If bitten by an animal, contact Nairi Medical Center.

II. Political Violence:

A. Historical Perspective: Armenia and neighboring Azerbaijan are engaged in ongoing hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh. There are periodic cease fire violations in the vicinity of the line of contact and the border, most recently in early March 2008.

B. Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime: PKK has a marginal propaganda presence in Armenia. However, the non-operational nature of this cell does not pose a threat to travelers. Armenia is also home to a considerable organized crime presence. Although there is sometimes violence associated with this criminal element, it normally is directed inward and does not affect those not affiliated with the organization.

C. International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism: At the moment, fortunately there is no significant risk of any backlash against U.S. interests in Armenia. Many global security threats facing the U.S. and the wider international community have no real cultural or political resonance in Armenia.

D. Civil Unrest: Following the February 2008 Presidential Election, rallies staged by opposition followers gathered as many as 50,000 participants in areas of Central Yerevan. After 11 days of protests, police dispersed demonstrators. In the course of police action on 1 March, numerous instances of excessive force were reported, and demonstrations became violent. Ten deaths were acknowledged by government officials, and over 200 people, demonstrators and police, were injured or hospitalized. A State of Emergency was declared and the situation was effectively neutralized. No violence was directed towards Americans.

III. Post-Specific Concerns:

A. Earthquakes and Floods: In 1988, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck the Armenian city of Spitak and the surrounding region, resulting in 50,000 deaths. Armenia is located in a seismically unstable/active zone, at the juncture of the Arabian and Eurasian plates; small tremors periodically occur in the region and the risk of catastrophic earthquakes exists.

B. Industrial and Transportation Accidents: There is the threat of a chemical and/or nuclear emergency from various aging Soviet industrial complexes, most serious of which is the Metsamor nuclear power plant located 18 miles from the embassy. All embassy residences, and therefore the city center, are within accident-planning proximity to the plant.

Armenian roads in general are in extremely poor condition and lack shoulder markings and centerlines. In addition, traffic signals may not work as a result of power-outages, poor maintenance, or theft of signaling equipment. Traffic signals and rules of the road are often ignored and roadside manners are poor. Motorists often drive in a reckless fashion and at high speeds with little regard for traffic flow and signs. Pedestrians enjoy no right of way and need to be very cautious when crossing the street. During the first 9 months of 2008 in Armenia, there were 1,587 accidents officially reported with 285 resulting in death.

The number of vehicles imported and registered annually increases each year, and the road system is unable to meet the demands placed upon it by the steady increase in drivers.

C. Kidnapping: N/A

D. Drugs and Narcotics: Armenia does not have a developed drug culture. Potential for Armenia to become an active transit area for drug traffickers exists, but is not widely exploited.

E. Other: Travelers are cautioned in using the Ijevan-Noyemberyan highway between the towns of Kirants and Baghanis/Voskevan. This portion of the highway, which is located in the northeast region of Tavush, borders Azerbaijan to the east, and lies in close proximity to the cease-fire line between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. This line has experienced numerous cease-fire violations over the years, which include small arms and sniper fire.

Investing and conducting business in Armenian may prove to be somewhat precarious. A lack of transparency in the Armenian tax and customs services can have a serious and detrimental affect on how taxes and customs duties are levied. This can result in business ventures becoming unprofitable. Other pitfalls include Armenian law that prohibits foreigners from owning property, opening one up to unscrupulous Armenian business partners, difficulty in enforcing legal judgments and an often lengthy and unproductive legal process.

IV. Police Response:

Police responses vary from region to region. Law enforcement officials lack sensitivity training. Victim response varies drastically depending on the individual, and few police officers have English language proficiency. American citizens who were detained in 2007 reported that law enforcement authorities observed general norms for handling and processing prisoners, providing American citizens access to legal counsel and consular services. There were no reports of physical or mental abuse.

A. If you are detained, incarcerated, and/or harassed by local law enforcement, please contact the American Embassy Consular Section for American Citizen Services (ACS) support. ACS may be contacted at (374) (10) 49-4686.

B. If you are the victim of a crime, immediately contact the police emergency line at 102 and/or proceed to the nearest police station to complete a police report. If further assistance is needed, contact the American Embassy Consular Section for American Citizen Services (ACS)

support.

The following emergency contact numbers are applicable across Armenia:

Fire Emergency: 101

Police Emergency: 102

Emergency Medical Services (Ambulance): 103

IV. Medical Emergencies:

Medical care in Armenia is limited. The American Embassy maintains a list of English-speaking physicians and other medical healthcare specialists. Although basic medical supplies, including disposable needles, anesthetics, and standard antibiotics are generally available throughout the country, advanced medical care is not available outside the capital. Individuals with existing health problems may be at risk due to inadequate medical facilities and services. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services.

Visitors are encouraged to ensure that immunizations are current, including vaccine for Hepatitis A and B. The U.S. Center for disease control recommends having had a tetanus/diphtheria booster within the last five years. Although there has not been a registered case of rabies in five years, pre-exposure rabies is recommended for occupational exposure only. Post-exposure prophylaxis should be sought even in those already immunized. This is due to the large number of street dogs and the inability of the local health system to provide immunizations. It

is recommended to carry a copy of one's immunization record when out and about.

IA. Contact information for local hospitals and clinics:

Nairi Medical Center
21 Pronyan St.
Dr. Narine Mamikonyan-English speaker
Ph. #: 374 10 53-77-42/58-00-99

Emergency & Trauma
Erebuni Medical Center
14 Titogradyan St.
Armen Charchyan-English speaker
Ph. #: 374 10 47-35-72/47-24-00
Cell #: (091) 41-17-88

VII. Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim:

Visitors to Armenia should exercise the same common sense precautions that would apply in a large American city. Pay particular attention to your surroundings in crowded market areas. Carry a flashlight at night - sidewalks are in poor condition and stairwells are seldom lit - and are a common site of criminal attack. Lock valuables out of sight in vehicles and use a lockable gas cap on your car. Vary your times and routes, especially from your place of residence/hotel to your work locations. Maintain a low profile and avoid ostentatious displays of wealth. Use established taxi companies and/or professional private drivers for travel in Armenia. If one is considering hiring private security in Armenia, please be advised that most private security companies provide little professional training and pay their staffs minimal salaries. No private security companies are endorsed by the Regional Security Office.

VIII. For further information:

U.S citizens living in or visiting Armenia are encouraged to register at the Consular Section of the U.S Embassy in Yerevan, where they may obtain updated information on travel and security in Armenia. The U.S. Embassy in Yerevan is located at 1 American Avenue.

IA. Embassy Contact Numbers:

Country Code 374
Yerevan City Code 10
Embassy Operator 49-42-00
Regional Security Officer 49-45-95
Embassy Health Unit 49-43-25
Consular 49-46-29
Pol/Econ 49-42-02
Post 1 Marine Guard 49-44-44
The U.S. Embassy in Armenia web site address is
<http://www.usa.am>.

VIII. OSAC Country Council: OSAC Armenia was re-established by Regional Security Office Yerevan in August of 2008. The council is currently in its infancy, but efforts are underway to contact American businesses, the American Chamber of Commerce, religious groups, and NGOs in order to rebuild the organization.

POC for OSAC Armenia is RSO Gordon Goetz. RSO Goetz may be reached at (374)(10) 49-45-95 or through e-mail at

goetzgh@state.gov. Secondary POC for OSAC Armenia is ARSO Avo Avetyan. ARSO Avetyan may be contacted at (374) (10) 49-43-06 or through e-mail at avetyanaa@state.gov.

I3. (U) For additional information on crime and political violence in Armenia, please refer to post's Consular Information Sheet (CIS).

I4. (U) END TEXT. No further information to follow.

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